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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [TU](#)

SUBJECT: HALKI: REAL PROGRESS AT LAST?

Classified By: Consul General David Arnett for reasons 1.5 (b & d)

1. (C) Summary and Comment: The Ecumenical Patriarchate, having learned through a variety of sources that the government is reportedly working to reopen the Halki Seminary, is optimistic this could happen in September. According to the Patriarchate, the proposal purportedly under development by the government would be the most forthcoming to date, but still would not open the school to foreign seminarians. Government officials so far are not able to confirm that any new proposals are in the works. Previously, the Patriarchate has refused to budge from its red lines on this issue. This latest optimism suggests that they may be inclined to pocket this offer, if it comes, and to continue working to redress outstanding concerns. At the same time, coming just before the NATO Summit and the President's visit, the GOT may be hoping to use this opportunity to look good and make progress on this long-standing issue. End Summary.

2. (C) In a June 18 meeting at the Ecumenical Patriarchate, Metropolitan Meliton of Philadelphia (the Ecumenical Patriarch's de facto Chief of Staff) told poloff he is optimistic about the chances for Halki Seminary being opened in September, and he confirmed that Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I told the press that the Orthodox seminary would be opened in the new academic year, as reported June 17 in the Turkish daily Cumhuriyet. According to Meliton, the Patriarch met last week with Prime Ministry officials after participating in a court case involving a dismissed Bulgarian priest, and learned that the government is preparing a solution in which Halki Seminary would be opened directly under the Ministry of Education, rather than as part of a university under the control of the Higher Education Council (YOK). The Metropolitan received a similar message last week from unnamed MFA sources.

3. (C) Such a proposal would ease a major stumbling block in resolving the issue, as the Patriarchate has demanded that the school be opened under its former, largely independent, status. The catch, however, is that from what Patriarchate officials have heard, the school would be opened only for Turkish citizens. In light of the dwindling numbers of Greek Orthodox in Turkey (approximately 2000-3000), opening Halki for Turkish citizens only would be just a first step and not a sustainable solution for the long term, according to Meliton. Nevertheless, "this is good," he said. If the school is to be opened, "now is the time," he said, "with the visit of President Bush." The Patriarchate is still working out its exact response to a possible government announcement, Meliton said, but his general reaction appeared to be positive.

4. (C) If the offer is made, the school could open as early as September, and thus the Patriarchate would have to get busy this summer in order to be ready to open it. As it stands now, at least four individuals would be ready and qualified to serve as staff members, including Meliton himself. The budget for the school would come from the Patriarchate, he said.

5. (C) Following this meeting, emboffs spoke with several Education Ministry officials in Ankara, but were unable to confirm that any new proposals for reopening Halki were in the works. A diplomat from the MFA Department of Greek Affairs said he "could not confirm or deny" the reports on Halki. On June 20, Radikal daily quotes YOK Chairman Tezic himself as raising problems with Halki Seminary falling under YOK (as GOT has repeatedly proposed), and suggesting instead that Halki Seminary would be most appropriately supervised by the Ministry of Education. For this to happen, Radikal added that some legislative reforms would be required.

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